CLAIMS

1. A disposable diaper having a front waist region, a back waist region, and a crotch region between the waist regions and comprising:

   an absorbent assembly having an interior surface and an exterior surface and laterally opposing longitudinally extending breathable side flaps, each side flap having longitudinally opposing ends and a longitudinally extending proximal edge, each side flap being attached adjacent to its ends to the interior surface of the absorbent assembly and having a longitudinally extending elastic gathering member attached adjacent to its proximal edge such that when allowed to relax, the elastic gathering member contracts and lifts the proximal edge away from the interior surface of the absorbent assembly, thereby raising the side flap to form a breathable side barrier; and

   a chassis attached to the exterior surface of the absorbent assembly and having an interior surface and an exterior surface and including a water-impermeable backsheet, wherein at least a portion of the chassis is extensible.

2. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the extensible portion of the chassis includes at least two distinct laterally extending altered regions each containing a pattern of generally longitudinally oriented alternating ridges and valleys created by a deformation of the portion of the chassis and also containing an unaltered region located between the altered regions, such that the portion of the chassis can be laterally extended to a given extent with the application of relatively less force than that required to laterally extend the same portion of the chassis to the same given extent before the deformation.

3. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein at least a portion of the chassis underlying the absorbent assembly in one of the waist regions is laterally extensible.

4. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein at least a portion of the chassis in one of the waist regions is laterally extensible to a greater degree than at least a portion of the chassis in the crotch region.

5. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein laterally opposing portions of the chassis in the crotch region are folded laterally inward to overlap the respective side flaps and are attached to the respective side flaps.

6. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly is attached to the chassis in a cruciform pattern of attachment.

7. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly has a length substantially equal to a length of the chassis.

8. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly has a length smaller than a length of the chassis.

9. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly includes an absorbent core and a water-impermeable lower covering sheet disposed exteriorly of the absorbent core.

10. The disposable diaper of Claim 9 wherein the absorbent assembly also includes a water-impermeable bottom sheet disposed between the lower covering sheet and the absorbent core.

11. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly includes an absorbent core storage component.

12. The disposable diaper of Claim 11 wherein the absorbent core storage component contains no airfelt.

13. The disposable diaper of Claim 11 wherein the absorbent assembly includes an absorbent core acquisition component.

14. The disposable diaper of Claim 13 wherein the absorbent core acquisition component has a length smaller than a length of the absorbent core storage component and is disposed longitudinally offset from the absorbent core storage component.

15. The disposable diaper of Claim 1 wherein the chassis includes at least one fastening element adapted for fastening the front waist region and the back waist region together to encircle a waist and legs of a wearer.

16. A disposable diaper having a front waist region, a back waist region, and a crotch region between the waist regions and comprising:

an absorbent assembly having an interior surface and an exterior surface and laterally opposing longitudinally extending breathable side flaps, each side flap having longitudinally opposing ends and a longitudinally extending proximal edge, each side flap being attached adjacent to its ends to the interior surface of the absorbent assembly and having a longitudinally extending elastic gathering member attached adjacent to its proximal edge such that when allowed to relax, the elastic gathering member contracts and lifts the proximal edge away from the interior

surface of the absorbent assembly, thereby raising the side flap to form a breathable side barrier; and

a chassis attached to the exterior surface of the absorbent assembly and having an interior surface and an exterior surface and including a water-impermeable backsheet and at least one fastening element for fastening the front waist region and the back waist region together to encircle a waist and legs of a wearer, wherein the fastening element is adapted to be openable and refastenable.

17. The disposable diaper of Claim 16 wherein the fastening element includes an adhesive tape tab.

18. The disposable diaper of Claim 16 wherein the fastening element includes a cohesive fastening element.

19. The disposable diaper of Claim 16 wherein the fastening element includes a mechanical fastener adapted to engage a nonwoven.

20. A disposable diaper having a front waist region, a back waist region, and a crotch region between the waist regions and comprising:

an absorbent assembly having an interior surface and an exterior surface and laterally opposing longitudinally extending breathable side flaps, each side flap having longitudinally opposing ends and a longitudinally extending proximal edge, each side flap being attached adjacent to its ends to the interior surface of the absorbent assembly and having a longitudinally extending elastic gathering member attached adjacent to its proximal edge such that when allowed to relax, the elastic gathering member contracts and lifts the proximal edge away from the interior surface of the absorbent assembly, thereby raising the side flap to form a breathable side barrier, wherein the absorbent assembly comprises an absorbent core storage component containing no airfelt; and

a chassis attached to the exterior surface of the absorbent assembly and having an interior surface and an exterior surface and including a water-impermeable backsheet.